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RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI PRIORITY 5788  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 003280

SIPDIS

NSC FOR WILDER AND PHU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/03/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: EX-PM THAKSIN ADDRESSES LARGE, PEACEFUL RALLY IN  
BANGKOK BY PHONE

REF: BANGKOK 3167 (THAKSIN CONVICTED)

Classified By: DCM James F. Entwistle, reason 1.4 (d).

¶1. (SBU) Loyalists of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra organized a pro-Thaksin/anti-coup peaceful gathering of tens of thousands of people wearing red shirts in Bangkok on November 1. From overseas, Thaksin addressed the crowd by phone, denouncing the "injustice" associated with his recent conviction (reftel). He claimed the Thai government was "helpless" in the face of dictatorial influences (presumably affecting Thailand's judiciary) that have persisted even after the formation of an administration led by Thaksin's allies. In Thaksin's most notable statement, which is subject to interpretation, he claimed that only "royal mercy" or "the people's power" could enable his return to Thailand.

¶2. (C) Comment: Thaksin's statement is controversial, and rightly so. He appears to be urging the King to act on his behalf, although convicts generally request a royal pardon after they begin serving their sentences, not when they are ensconced abroad to avoid incarceration. Also, raising "the people's power" as an alternative to "royal mercy" could make it seem as though Thaksin is disputing the Palace's supremacy, or trying to drive a wedge between the Palace and "the people." Spokesmen for Thaksin and his party publicly clarified November 3 that Thaksin was not requesting a royal pardon. End Comment.

Responses, and minor political violence  
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¶3. (SBU) The Thai media quoted Armed Forces Supreme Commander Songkitti Chakkrabat as saying, in response to Thaksin's address, that "The Armed Forces will not stand idle if Thaksin's remarks are found to have offended the royal institution." Leaders of the anti-government People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) reiterated their demand for an end to the Somchai Wongsawat administration.

¶4. (SBU) For their part, several hundred red-shirted supporters of Thaksin surrounded the Chiang Mai station of the Thai Public Broadcasting Service (TPBS) mid-day November 3 to protest TPBS allegations that November 1 rally participants had received 500-3,000 baht each to attend. The Chaing Mai 51 group, led by Petchawat Watanapongsirikul, threatened to cut electricity and water supply if TPBS

management did not withdraw the allegation.

15. (SBU) Separately, in the pre-dawn hours of November 2, PAD guards near the occupied Government House compound in Bangkok allegedly shot a 22-year-old man who insulted them while driving a vehicle. PAD guards alleged that the man and his companions fired shots at them first. The injured driver was hospitalized, and a police investigation is ongoing.  
JOHN